

The Church of *Rome's* Claim of AUTHORITY and INFALLIBILITY examined.

IN A
SERMON

Preached at

SALTERS-HALL,

January 30th, 1734.



By *GEORGE SMYTH*^k, M. A.
With ADDITIONS.

The SECOND EDITION.

L O N D O N :

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2 Cor. i. 24.

*Not for that we have Dominion
over your Faith, but are Help-
ers of your Joy : For by Faith
ye stand.*

I APPEAR before you this Day, to charge the Church of *Rome* with boldly usurping, and tyrannically exercising, that *Dominion* over the Faith of Christians, which the Apostle in the Text so expressly disclaims, and which he never once exercised in all his Life. If I can make good this Charge, I shall at once vindicate some of the Redeemer's unalienated *Prerogatives*; and defend some of the most sacred *Rights* of the Christian World, against this Church which so insolently violates them.

It will not surely be said, that though St. *Paul* was not invested with this *Dominion*, yet that St. *Peter* was; and that therefore Popes as his Successors, and Vicars general of Christ upon Earth, may justly exercise it. For besides that St. *Paul* was an Apostle; speaks here in that Character; and when

he owns, *WE have no Dominion over your Faith*, seems to disclaim it not only for himself, but in the Name of all the Apostles and Ministers of Jesus Christ, of what Rank and Eminence soever in the Christian Church; besides this, I say, He tells us in two several Places of this very Epistle, that he was *in nothing behind the very chiefest Apostles* *; and yet certainly he must have been far behind one of them, at least, if St. Peter was appointed supreme Head of the Church, and was entrusted with that AUTHORITY, and endowed with that INFALIBILITY, which his Successors now pretend to.

These are the *Powers and Privileges*, which the Church of Rome says she is invested with: It falls to my Share to examine them; and I hope to convince you before I have done, that never were any Claims more unjustly made, or more weakly and slenderly supported.

Her Claims upon the Foot of *Authority* are many, and of different Kinds; but as I have neither Time nor Inclination to extend the Subject of this Discourse further than was designed, when I was desired to treat of it; much less to invade the Province of any Person engaged with me in this Service; I shall confine my self to that *Authority* which she claims in *matters of Faith*; and then go on to enquire into her *Infallibility*.

The former may, I think, be fairly stated; and will, I believe, be fully confuted, under the following Propositions.

I. That the Church hath Authority to settle the Canon of Scripture, and to determine what Books

* 2. Cor. xi. 5. and xii. 11.

are, and what are not Canonical, in such manner as that, by Vertue of her Authority, all Christians are obliged to receive those which she receives, and to reject those which she rejects.

II. That the Authority of Scripture as to us (*quoad nos*) and the Regard we are to pay to it, depends upon the Authority of the Church, which delivers these Scriptures to us, and declares them to be the Word of God.

III. That the Church hath Authority to interpret and give the Sense of Scripture; which Interpretation all Christians are obliged to receive and submit to.

IV. That since many Things which ought to be believed, are not at all contained in Scripture, the Church hath Authority to decree these as necessary to Salvation; and all Christians are thereupon obliged to believe them.

V. That she has a Right to judge and determine authoritatively, all Controversies relating to Matters of Faith; so as that all Christians are obliged to submit to her Decision.

If upon hearing these Claims made, you should be dispos'd to ask, (as any honest inquisitive Person would naturally do) Pray where is all this Power and Authority lodg'd? who is invested with it? who is to exercise it? you will be told the Catholick Church; meaning their own Church of Rome: and with this answer they have taught their own Votaries to rest satisfied. But we Protestants, who know that general answers are often deceitful and evasive, and that this in particular is so; are not thus to be put off. For tho' at present we should
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pass by the Absurdity of calling a Part the whole; I mean of Calling that the Catholick Church, which to say the best of it is but a part, and that a very corrupt one too, of the Catholick Church; we must beg to be a little more particularly informed. This Catholick Church means either some one or more Persons, in whom this Authority is vested: Is it then diffusively in the Church Universal, *i. e.* in all Churches thro' out the World? Or is it in the Church Representative, *i. e.* in a General council? Or is it in the Church Virtual, (as they express it) *i. e.* in his Holiness the Pope? The Advocates of *Rome* are as much perplex'd how to answer, and as little agreed in the Answers they give here, as we shall find them to be presently, when we come to ask the same Questions, with relation to their pretended *Infallibility*: And as they will be there urg'd more at large, I at present take no further notice of them but go on to shew you; That no one Man, no set or number of Men on Earth, has any just claim to the Authority we are speaking of. In order to which I'll briefly consider the Particulars which have been mention'd; and since several of them may (in another view) fall under the notice of some other of my Brethren; I will take what care I can to keep to the Point of *Authority*; and not to repeat or anticipate, what has been, or may be, more pertinently said by them.

I. It is pretended that the Church hath Authority to settle the Canon of Scripture, to determine what Books are, and what are not Canonical; in such manner as that by vertue of her Authority, all Christians

fians are obliged to receive those which she receives,
 and to reject those which she rejects. And here you
 are to observe, that it is not their enquiring, and
 judging, and determining for themselves what Books
 are canonical, that we complain of: For this is a Privi-
 ledge which we think all capable persons may claim;
 We exercise it our selves, and should be far enough
 from blaming them for doing so too. But that which
 we complain of is, their taking upon them to Deter-
 mine this Point for all the World, and their discourag-
 ing all private Examination, and condemning with a
 dreadful Curse, all Contradiction to their Decrees con-
 cerning it. For so the Council of Trent has done.
 Whole words are as follows; " The Synod hath seen
 " fit to annex to this Decree, a List of the sacred
 " Books; lest a Doubt should arise in any one's mind,
 " which they are that the Synod receives"; and then
 follows the Catalogue it self of all the Books both of
 the Old and New Testament, which we Protestants
 own, with an Addition of Six Apocryphal Books to
 the Old Testamant: after which they thus go on:
 " If any one does not receive these entire Books,
 " and every part of them, as they are wont to be
 " read in the Catholick Church, and are contained
 " in the Ancient Latin Edition, for sacred and Ca-
 " nonical, let him be Anathema" *. One would expect
 that, after such a Positive Determination, and such
 a dreadful Sanction added to it, they should have
 some very good Title to produce for their Authority,
 and some very strong Reasons for their admitting
 all these Books into their Canon. As to the Latter,
 their reasons are all taken from what Councils and

* Conc. Trid. Sess. 4. Decret. de Canon Scripturis.

Fathers have said of this matter; particularly the 3d Council of *Carthage*, at which *St. Austin* was present; wherein (it is pretended) the very same Books were decreed to be Canonical, that are mention'd in the Council of *Trent's* Catalogue. In answer to which, it might easily be shewn, that Councils and Fathers, are both for number and weight, against them: That the design of this 3d Council of *Carthage* was, not to determine what Books were Canonical, in the sense in which that Word must be understood in this Dispute; but only to declare what Books might be profitably read in the publick Assemblies of Christians: That *St. Austin* himself when he calls the apocryphal Books Canonical, plainly means no more, then that as they contain useful Precepts and Instructions for Life and Manners, they may be publickly read to the Edification of the Church; but without any Design of setting them upon an equal foot with those which are Canonical in the highest and strictest Sense of the Word. That these Books themselves, contain so many idle Fables, gross Absurdities, plain Inconsistencies, and palpable Contradictions; as could never have been dictated by the Spirit of God, and far outweigh all the Reasons that can be produc'd for admitting them into the Canon. All this and a great deal more might be unanswerably urg'd, but I choose to keep close to the Point of *Authority*: for tho' their Catalogue had been precisely the same with our own; yet as we dare not assume to ourselves, so we can never allow to any body else, Authority to oblige all Christians under Pain of Damnation to receive precisely the same number of Books as Canonical.

nonical. Let us enquire therefore how this *Authority* is supported. Their Proof stands thus: The Testimony of the Church is the only means by which it can now, or could at any time be known, which Books are Canonical Scripture and which are not; the Church therefore must have *Authority* to determine in this Case. And all Christians must be oblig'd under the dreadfulest Penalty to stand by her Determination: Now tho' I am far from thinking that this is the *only* means; yet since I am ready to grant that (if it be rightly understood) it is one very good means, by which a Judgment may be form'd in this matter; I will at present take no notice of this defect in the Argument; but only consider what sort of a Proof this is, of the *Authority* claim'd. When the Bible is first put into the Hands of Children, they are told by their Parents and Instructors, that it is the Word of God: When they grow up to ripeness of Judgment, they may if they please, find that Christians in all Ages from the Apostles down to their own Times, have been so far agreed in this Point, that their concurring Testimony, is one proper reason to induce us to believe so too. But how does this prove the *Authority* we are talking of? Is there no difference between being a credible Witness in a Cause, and being an authoritative Judge? May I not prudently attend to, and weigh, nay, believe the Truth of a Man's Testimony, without being oblig'd to stand by his Sentence and Determination, as a Judge? We receive the Testimony of the Church in all Ages, because it appears to us credible, and because (all Circumstances consider'd) we think it utterly improba-

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ble that so many Persons shou'd either themselves be deceiv'd, or conspire to deceive us; but it does not follow by any means, that therefore we are to submit to the Determination of the Church (much less the particular Church of *Rome*) as an authoritative Judge. It is farther pretended,

II. That the Authority of Scriptures (*quoad nos*) as to us, and the regard we are to pay to it, depends upon the *Authority* of the Church, which delivers these Scriptures to us, and declares them to be the Word of God. This Point, I confess, is not any where that I know of, expressly and *in terminis*, decreed by the Council of *Trent*: But the ablest defenders of the Church of *Rome*, have either expressly asserted it; or said that, from which it necessarily follows. *Hosius*, in justification of a bold Fellow who had said, that without the Testimony of the Church the Scripture wou'd be just of the same value and authority with *Æsop's* Fables, tells us that it was *piè dictum*; For that without the Church's Testimony, Scripture wou'd be of no great weight. Another declares that were it not for the Authority of the Church, He wou'd give no more credit to *St. Mat.* then to *Livy*. *Bellarmino* says, that if you take away the *Authority* of the Church of *Rome*, the whole Christian Faith may be question'd as doubtful *. And in another Place (for these things don't drop from them by chance, and una-

* Nam si tollamus auctoritatem præsentis Ecclesiæ, & præsentis Concilii, in dubium revocari poterunt omnium aliorum Conciliorum Decreta, & tota Fides Christiana. — Et præterea omnium Conciliorum veterum & omnium dogmatum firmitas, pender ab Auctoritate præsentis Ecclesiæ. *Bellarmin.* de Effectu Sacram. Lib. 2. Cap. 25. § *Tertium Testimonium.*

wares.) The Scripture Traditions and all Doctrines whatsoever, depend on the Testimony of the Church, without which all are uncertain *. There are others of them (nay, and some of these themselves, at other times) who talk a little more modestly, in appearance at least, tho' in effect they say much the same things. They distinguish the Authority of Scriptures *quoad se*, and *quoad nos*, i. e. in itself, and as to us. They own that the Authority of Scripture *quoad se*, is sacred and divine, and independent of the Church; but that as to any Authority it has, *quoad nos*, with respect to us, it neither has, nor can have any but what depends upon the Authority of the Church: And if it does not follow from hence that all the regard and reverence we owe to Scripture stands upon the foot of the same Authority, I shall despair of ever knowing what a just Consequence is. I could quote to you, *Stapleton*, *Bellarmin*, and *Melchior Canus*, and a great many more, to prove that this is the Doctrine even of their moderate Writers: But as I apprehend this will not be deny'd, I choose to shew you that how plausible soever this distinction may appear, there is really nothing in it to the purpose; and that tho' there were, yet that it is utterly false that the Church has any such Authority upon which the Authority of Scripture as to us depends.

1. The distinction has no meaning pertinent to the present purpose; nor is there any difference (as

* Nam cum Scripturæ traditiones & omnia plane dogmata, ex Testimonio Ecclesiæ pendeant; nisi certissimi simus quæ sit vera Ecclesia, incerta erunt prorsus omnia. *Bellarmin. de Eccl. Milit. L. 3. C. 10. §. ad hoc necesse est.*

to the matter in Hand) between the Authority of Scripture *in itself*, and *as to us*. For what are we to understand by the Authority of Scripture *in itself*? So far as I find, what they say to explain it, amounts to no more then this; that the Scriptures are sacred and divine, and proceed from God as their Author: All which is very true; and it is as true that the Authority of the Scriptures results from their being thus sacred and divine; but their being so, is not (properly speaking) their Authority: For all proper Authority is relative to those who owe regard and subjection to it; and thus, the Authority of Scripture is that Power or Vertue which it has (as being the Word of God) to oblige us to believe and practice what it declares and enjoins: Which (if Words have any meaning) is its Authority *as to us*. So that either this is a distinction without a difference; or at least it is quite impertinent to the matter in debate. But tho' it were never so proper and pertinent, I add,

2. It is utterly false that the Church has any such Authority, upon which the Authority of Scripture *as to us* depends. For we have seen already, that this Authority of Scripture arises from, and therefore must depend upon, its being the Word of God. This, and not the authoritative Declaration of the Church that it is so, is what gives it its binding Force, even *as to us*. Well, but still it is asked over again, How do you know that these Scriptures are the Word of God but by the Testimony of the Church? So that after all, Recourse must be had to her Authority. To which I answer over again, That as I have other Proofs besides the Testimony of the Church, by which I am induced to believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God; so
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the Testimony of the Church is so different a thing from its Authority, that I may credit the former in this case, without submitting to the latter. St. Paul says to the *Ephesians* (what is equally true of the whole Christian Church) *Ye are built upon the Foundation of the Prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief Corner-Stone* †; i. e. not the Persons of the Prophets, Apostles, and Jesus Christ, but the Doctrines and Truths taught by them, and contained in the Scriptures, are the Foundation on which the Church is built: All the Authority and Privileges therefore with which this Church is invested, must stand upon the same Bottom; i. e. upon Scripture: And to say Truth, hither they refer us for the Proof of them. Is this consistent with their saying, That the Authority of Scripture, *as to us*, depends upon the Authority of the Church? What, does the Church receive Authority from Scripture with one Hand, and give Authority to Scripture with the other? Do the Foundation and Superstructure change Places, and mutually become both to each other? In defiance of these, and a great many more such Absurdities, it is still insisted on that the Church has this Authority. And *Stapleton* will tell you, That though *Hermas's Pastor* is indeed an Apocryphal Book, yet the Church might if she had pleased have decreed it to be a Canonical one, and obliged her Children to have received it as such. What shall we say to such an Assertion? I am not the first who has been led by it, to call to mind what *Tertullian* and *Chrysostom* say, upon Occasion of the Senate of *Rome's* Authority to judge

† Eph. ii. 20.

and determine, what Gods should be owned and worshipped by the *Romans*. The former says, *Among you, Deity is examined into just as Men please; and unless the God whose Deity they are enquiring into pleases them, he shall be no God for them* *. The latter says, That the *Roman Senate* has *this Dignity or Privilege, to vote for, and admit into the Number of their Gods* †. May it not be said in the same manner of *Rome Papal*, That unless Scripture pleases them it shall not be Scripture; and that what Books shall be, and have the Authority of, Scripture, is to be carried by their Votes, and determined by their Decree? But the Claim (insolent as it is) calls for a graver Answer: Take the following one. *Hermas* either did, or he did not, write the Book called *Pastor* under divine Inspiration; and consequently, it either was, or was not, Canonical (*i. e.* an authoritative Rule of Faith and Manners) as soon as he had published it, and before the Church had determined any thing about it. If it was, there was no need of the Authority of the Church to give Authority to the Book; for by the same Reasons by which it was proved to be written by Inspiration, it was proved to be of divine Authority: If it was not, no Authority in the World could make it such. You will please to observe, That the same Reasoning will serve, as to all Books, whether really or pretendedly belonging to the Ca-

* Apud vos de humano arbitratu divinitas pensatur; nisi homini Deus placuerit, Deus non erit. *Testul. Apol. C. 5. p. 6. Ed. Rigaltii, Ann. 1634.*

† Ταύτην εἶχε ἀξίαν [marg. ἐξουσίαν] κατεγορεύειν καὶ ἐγκρίνειν θεός. *Chrysost. Op. v. 3. p. 686. Ed. Savil.*

non ; and effectually disprove any Interest that the Authority of the Church has in this Matter. I go on to the Third Proposition.

III. That the Church hath Authority to interpret and fix the Sense of Scripture ; and that all Christians are obliged to receive and submit to her Interpretation. Thus the Council of *Trent* hath decreed, That “ it belongs to the Church to judge
 “ of the true Sense and Interpretation of Scripture,
 “ and that no Person shall dare to interpret it in
 “ Matters relating to Faith and Manners, to any
 “ Sense contrary to that which the Church has held,
 “ and does still hold, or contrary to the unanimous
 “ Consent of the Fathers *. In which Words we are referred, you see, to the Church, and to the unanimous Consent of the Fathers, for the true Sense and Interpretation of Scripture. Now to pass by the ridiculous Absurdity of referring private Christians to the Decrees of Popes or Councils, or to the Writings of the Fathers, which they have neither Leisure nor Skill to consult ; I would fain know how it is possible for the most learned and laborious Man in the World to come at the Sense of Scripture this Way ? Has the Church it self (mean by it what you will) always been uniformly of the same Opinion, as to the Sense of all the Texts of Scripture, which she has interpreted ? If this should be pretended, the contrary may easily be shewn. Take any one Text of Scripture, about the Sense of which Protestants and Papists disagree, and I will defy any Man alive to prove, that the Fathers unanimously agree in that Interpretation of it, which the Pa-

* Conc. Trid. Sess. 4. Decret. de Edir. & usu Sac. Libr.

pists contend for, against the Protestants. How then is it possible to find the Sense of Scripture this way, when the Church it self has not always, and in all Points, been of the same Mind ; when the Fathers are far from always agreeing with themselves, or with one another ; and when the Doctrines and Interpretations of the Church of *Rome* on the one Hand, and the Fathers on the other, are in many Instances so widely different ? But that which is more directly to my present Purpose, is, to shew that though we could come at that Interpretation of Scripture which the Church holds, and the Fathers agree in ; though this might afford a favourable Presumption that such Interpretation is right ; yet it does by no means follow from hence, that the Church may authoritatively fix the Sense of Scripture ; or that no Man may in any case (be the Reasons never so good) differ from or reject her Interpretation. Our Adversaries charge us with Pride and Disobedience, a Spirit of Faction and Rebellion, for not blindly submitting to the Decrees of the Church : But the Charge is an unjust one. They know, or may know (for it has often been declared) that we are ready to pay all proper Deference to the Judgment of wise and learned Men : And when a great Number, and a long Succession of such, can be shewn to have agreed in the Interpretation of any Texts of Scripture ; especially if such their Agreement appears to have proceeded from sober Enquiry, and thorough Conviction, without Prejudice or corrupt Biass ; we own that great Regard is to be had to them, and that such their Interpretation is not lightly to be rejected or departed from :
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But still we cannot submit to them as *Lords of our Faith* : We are ready to hear them and learn of them ; but we can see no Reason why they should be to us instead of Christ, or expect from us that implicit Submission which is due to him only, and those commissioned by him, and inspired by his Spirit. He that is any thing versed in the Writings of the *Papists*, has often found them boasting of their *omnes, semper, & ubique* ; The whole Church, all the Fathers, at all Times, and in all Places, agreeing in their Doctrines and Interpretations of Scripture. They have been often answered (and I believe Protestants are still of the same Mind) that as to any Points in which they can shew *such* an Agreement, we will not oppose or contradict them. But then as we know that such Agreement can never be shewn, in any of the Points in Difference betwixt them and us ; so we take leave farther to declare, that even in this case, our giving in to, and not opposing Points so agreed, would be owing to a rational Persuasion, that things so universally maintained must be true, and not to an Opinion of any proper Authority the Persons so agreeing have over us in these Matters. You see then that we are ready to pay to Church and Fathers all proper Deference and Regard ; and where they have Reason or Scripture on their Side, we have no Inclination to disagree with them. But it is *Authority* which is claimed ; it is blind Submission that is required ; without which all the rest (it is pretended) signifies nothing. Let us see then upon what this *Authority* to interpret Scripture for us, and this Demand of implicit Submission from us, is founded. Is it up-
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on Scripture ; or any Promise there given them, of an *infallible* Guidance by the Spirit of God, in these Matters ? Their Proofs of this sort, will be considered and confuted when I come to the Point of *Infallibility*. Is it that they have greater natural Abilities or acquired Advantages, for interpreting Scripture, than Protestants have ? Besides, that this can never be proved, and need not be granted ; we are firmly persuaded, that such Freedom of Enquiry as Protestants plead for, and exercise in interpreting Scripture, is an Advantage for coming at the true Sense of it ; which those of the Church of *Rome*, who are bound down by the Decree of Popes and Councils, and the Opinions of Fathers, must necessarily want : And after all, supposing they had these superior abilities and advantages ; though upon this account it might be fit to attend to, and consider whether the Sense they fix on Scripture be the true one ; yet it would by no means prove them to be *Authoritative* Interpreters. Is it that they use properer Means, take fitter Methods to come at the Sense of Scripture than we do ; and that therefore their Authority in this Matter, should be owned and submitted to ? We say they do not ; but however let any impartial Person judge between us. We think the proper methods to be taken for this Purpose, are to consult the Scriptures in the Original Languages ; to compare the more obscure and difficult Texts of it, with those which speak of the same Matters more plainly and intelligibly ; not to understand any particular Texts of Scripture in such a Sense, as contradicts, or is inconsistent with, the whole Design and Tenour of it ; to attend diligently

ly to all such Circumstances of Persons writing or written to, Time, Place, &c. which may give Light to the Matter we are enquiring after ; in short, the very same Methods which all Men of Sense take, to understand Writings of any other sort, in which they meet with difficulties : And he that on account of the Importance and Sacredness of the Matters enquired into, shall add fervent Prayer to the Father of Lights, and his utmost Care to keep his Mind free from Lust, Passion, and corrupt Prejudices ; as he may reckon upon it, that he will not be left ignorant of any Truth necessary to Salvation, nor suffered to fall into any damnable Error ; so he bids fair for coming at the true Sense of Scripture, even in Matters of less Moment.

But all these methods (say our Adversaries) are insufficient, and have been found unsuccessful; those who pretend to make use of them still differ in their Interpretation of Scripture. I Answer, that tho' they may differ in matters of less Importance, yet there is no Reason to think that those who honestly use these methods, shall ever be suffer'd to err in any Points absolutely necessary to their Salvation. Let us see however, what are those better and surer methods which they follow : *Stapleton* reckons up four of them : the Rule of Faith, (of which Tradition is a part); the Practice of the Church; the Sense of Scripture in which the Fathers agree; and the Sense decreed by Councils: These you are to follow and you cannot err ; and these are the only sure methods of Interpreting Scripture. As to the first of these, the Rule of Faith; so far as they mean Scripture by it, we are agreed ; for they know we own

Scripture to be the best help to interpret Scripture. But when they take in unwritten Tradition as a part of the Rule of Faith, and tell us that Scripture is to be Interpreted by that; we reject it, as being for many reasons utterly unfit for any such Purpose: particularly as being it self much more obscure, uncertain, and doubtful, than Scripture which is to be interpreted by the help of it. And then as to the other three methods prescrib'd; surely nothing was ever more impertinent; it is a direct taking for granted, the Point in debate: the Enquiry is, what are the best methods of Interpreting and coming at the Sense of Scripture? the answer is, Follow the Church, Fathers, and Councils: *i. e.* don't Interpret or judge of the Sense of it, (tho' this is the very thing propos'd to be done) but blindly follow the Interpretation and Sense of it, which others have Authoritatively determin'd beforehand. For tho' these are called methods or means of interpreting Scripture; and by our being directed to them for that purpose, one might be apt to conclude that we were to fix the Sense of Scripture by the use of these means; and to judge how far they are or are not useful for that purpose; yet I can assure you that no such thing is intended or will be allow'd; so far from it, that the Council of *Trent* (as you have heard) has decreed, that no man shall dare to interpret Scripture to any Sense, contrary to that which the Church holds, and the Fathers agree in: And let who will set about the work of interpreting Scripture, tho' he be never so well qualify'd for it; at his peril be it, if in matters of Faith or Manners, he departs a hair's breadth from what is before determin'd to be the true Sense of it. So that
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you see after all, when they talk of private Persons Interpreting Scripture, and seem to direct to what they call proper methods of judging of the true Sense of it; they really mean no such thing, nor will allow any such Priviledge to any body but their own Church: nay, if they would Speak consistently, they must all of them own, what a very powerful party among them assert and maintain; that the Authority of interpreting Scripture is inherent in his Holiness the Pope: for their Rule of Faith, is that which the Pope approves; their Usage and Practice of the Church, is what he pleases to observe himself, and direct others to observe; the Interpretation of the Fathers, is what he sees fit to follow; and the Decrees of Councils are then only binding, when he has graciously vouchsaf'd to confirm them.

There is another Argument upon which they lay very great Stress, in proving this Authority of the Church to interpret Scripture. I will just mention it here, tho' it will be more fully consider'd and answer'd under the head of *Infallibility*. It is thus: Scripture (they tell us) is an *unsens'd Letter*, ('tis their own Expression). It has no determinate meaning or signification of its own; and in order to understand it rightly, it is necessary that some body shou'd have Authority to interpret and fix the Sense of it: This Power (they say) Christ has given to the Church; and who so fit for it? Who so likely to make a good use of it? That we may not be impos'd upon by this specious Argument; It must be remember'd that there is a wide Difference between interpreting Scripture by the best helps, and in the best manner we can; and doing it authorita-
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tively, so as to oblige the Consciences of Men to receive and submit to our Interpretation, without varying from it or daring to contradict it. The former we say the Christian Church, and every Member of it, may do, and are allow'd and encourag'd by their Saviour to do it: Nay, if they set honestly about it, they may hope for and reckon upon such divine Assistance, as will secure them from any such mistakes as will prove damnable at last: The latter, is what neither this nor any other Argument in the World will ever prove. For any Man to say that Scripture is an *unsens'd Letter*, which has no certain sense or meaning till the Church determines what that sense or meaning is; is talking either very impertinently, or very impudently: If they intend by it, that the Words or Letters of Scripture, as written or printed on Paper, are mere arbitrary marks, and have no meaning in them; it is utterly impertinent: For this is equally true of all the Books and Writings in the World; it is as true of their interpretation of Scripture when committed to Paper, as of Scripture itself. If they intend by it, that the Letters and Words of Scripture are not fitted to convey to, or excite in our Minds, any certain and determinate meaning; it is horridly impudent: It is a bold affront to the blessed God, and an unworthy disparagement of the Revelation he has vouchsaf'd us in his Word. Are we then to think, that tho' Men can by writing or speaking convey their meaning to each other, with all the certainty that is needful; yet that the blessed God cannot? Or shall we say, that tho' he could, yet he would not? Even when he was giving us a Book
which

which could be of no use to us any farther than it was understood ; concerning which he himself declares, that it is profitable to all necessary purposes, and able to make us wise to Salvation. In short, if this authoritative claim is a just one, Scripture (for ought I see) deserves this, and all the rest of the disparaging things, they have said about it : For upon this Supposition, it can be of no use to us, nor have we any need of it : If it has no determinate meaning till the Church by Inspiration fixes one, to what purpose was it to commit the divine will to writing ? For any good end it answers, it seems to us, God might as well constantly, or as occasion offer'd, have reveal'd his Will to Popes and Councils, to be by them handed out to particular Christians ; as be oblig'd still to reveal the true sense and meaning of those writings. The supposition therefore upon which this Argument proceeds, is you see both impudent and false ; and the Consequence drawn from it, that therefore the Church may and can *authoritatively* and *infallibly* interpret these unmeaning Scriptures, is of a Piece with it ; as I shall shew you more fully by and by. I go on to a fourth Claim.

IV. That since many Things which ought to be believed and done, are not at all contained in Scripture, the Church hath *Authority* to decree and enjoin these Things as necessary to Salvation ; and all Christians are thereupon obliged to believe and practise accordingly. I readily own, that upon some Occasions, the *Popish* Writers themselves will some of them say Things utterly inconsistent with this Claim. Thus, *e. g.* *Bellarmin* tells us in one Place
of

of his Writings (though it plainly contradicts what he himself says elsewhere) That no Proposition can be [*de fide*] an Article of Faith, but what is revealed in Scripture *. Others of them have in Words expressly disclaimed all Power in the Church to coin new Articles of Faith. But it will be easy to shew you, that many of them claim this Authority for the Church; and that all of them hold such Principles from which it must necessarily follow; tho' when it serves their Purpose they would seem to disclaim it. Many of them expressly claim it: Thus, *e. g.* *Melchior Canus* says, There are many Things belonging to the Faith of Christians, which are neither manifestly nor obscurely contained in the sacred Scriptures. *Stapleton* will tell you, That many Things necessary to be believed, in order to Salvation, are not comprehended in the Scriptures, but are recommended to us only by the Authority of the Church. And elsewhere, That the Church may propose and define Matters of Faith, without any evident, or so much as probable, Testimony of Scripture. I might add many more, if it were needful: But I go on, to shew you, That they all hold such Principles from which it necessarily follows, that the Church has Authority to decree many Things as necessary to Salvation, which the Scripture takes no Notice of. They all maintain, that Tradition unwritten, is a part of the Rule of Faith, and *to be received with the same pious Affecti-*

* *Sciendum est enim, propositionem fidei concludi tali syllogismo.*

Quicquid Deus revelavit in Scripturis est verum: Hoc Deus revelavit in Scripturis: Ergo hoc est verum. Bellarm. De Verb. Dei L. 3. C. 10. Resp. ad Arg. 15.

on and Reverence, that is due to Scripture *. Now by the Help of this same Tradition, they know a Power of Things, of which our Bibles say never a Word. And as you heard before concerning Scripture, that its Authority, *as to us*, depends upon the Authority of the Church, and that it has no certain meaning other than what the Church is pleased to put upon it, and propose to us to be believed ; So they tell us as to unwritten Traditions too, that tho' they come either *from the Mouth of Christ himself, or were dictated by the Holy Spirit, and have been handed down by a continued Succession* † ; yet that they receive all their Authority from the Church : *i. e.* If these Traditions relate to Matters of Faith, no Man is obliged to believe them ; or if they relate to Manners, no Man is obliged to observe them, as necessary to Salvation ; 'till the Church has declared and proposed them to be so : But then, as soon as ever the Church has interposed with her Authority, to propose and declare them as necessary to Salvation, immediately they are so. Would you think it ? To believe the perpetual Virginity of the blessed Virgin shall be an Article of Faith ; and to fast in *Lent* shall be a pious Practice, necessary to Salvation ; if the Church pleases to propose and declare them such. On the other Hand ; To believe that *God is in Christ Jesus reconciling the World unto himself*, and to pray to God in the Name of *Christ Jesus* ; shall neither of them be necessary to Salvation, till the Church declares them to be so. Nay, you could never know

* Conc. Trid. Sess. 4. Decret. de Canon Scripturis.

† Conc. Trid. *ibid.*

that the former is a Christian Doctrine, and the latter a Christian Duty, unless the Church had told you that such and such Texts of Scripture are to be interpreted to this Sense; and had, by her Authority, declared them necessary to Salvation.

I am apt to think, this will appear strange, and sound harshly to Protestant Ears; but I can tell you somewhat else, which, it may be, you will wonder at as much: Some of their own Authors are ingenuous enough to own, that all those Doctrines and Practices of the Church, whose Author and Original is not to be found in Scripture, are to be reckoned Apostolical Traditions: and they own that the following are of this sort: St. *Peter's* having been at *Rome*, and the Primacy of the Bishop of that See; the Sacrifice of the Altar; real Presence; Communion in one kind; private Mass; the keeping and adoring the consecrated Host; the Sacraments of Confirmation, Orders, Matrimony, Penance, and extreme Unction; the Necessity of auricular Confession to a Priest; Indulgences; Purgatory; and in short, almost every Point in Difference between them and us: And yet after all, these very Men, when they debate these Points with Protestants, have the Face to quote Scripture to us in Defence of them, after owning that they are not founded upon Scripture, but only upon Apostolical Tradition. *Authority* and *Infallibility* will it seems bear them out, in doing what we *fallible* Hereticks think very strange things. It falls not within my Province to detect the Falshood and Forgery of these unwritten Traditions, by the help of which such marvellous Feats are to be done: But after having shewn

shewn you that they have made many Things to be *de fide*, and necessary to Salvation, which they own have no other Foundation; it is my Business to prove to you, that they have no *Authority* to do so: And to shew you moreover, that as to those Things which are contained in Scripture, their being Articles of Faith, and necessary to Salvation, depends, not upon the *authoritative* Proposition or Declaration of the Church, but upon their having this Stress laid upon them in Scripture it self. As I was musing with my self, how to propose my Argument against such Authority, in the clearest and most intelligible manner; I at first thought it might be proper to begin with enquiring, Whether absolutely every thing which the Church may see fit to propose and declare necessary to be believed and done in order to Salvation, be for that Reason, and that Reason only, *so* necessary? If the Answer had been (as surely it ought to be) No; I should have gone on and reason'd thus: It follows therefore, that besides the authoritative Proposition and Declaration of the Church, there must be somewhat either in the Nature of the Things themselves, or in the Source and Original from whence they derive, which contributes (at least) towards their being necessary to Salvation, and without which it would not be fit, even for the Church itself, to declare them so. And from hence I designed to have concluded the very Point I was to prove, that therefore it is not the Church's authoritative Proposition and Declaration only, that can make these things necessary to be believed and done in order to Salvation. And I am fully persuaded, that if the Enquiry just now mentioned, be answered in the negative, this Reason-

ing thereupon, would be unanswerably conclusive. But I soon saw Reason to alter my Method of Arguing; because I suspected whether I might not be answer'd in the affirmative; that absolutely every thing which the Church may see fit to propose and declare necessary to Salvation, is so, for that reason, and that Reason only. For why should I imagine any thing to be too absurd for the Church of *Rome* to decree necessary to be believ'd, after it has decreed the Doctrine of Transubstantiation necessary to be believ'd? Why should I think any thing could be too trifling for that Church to require, which has recommended Pilgrimages to the Churches and Reliques of dead Saints? Why should I take it for granted, that any thing was so monstrously bad and wicked, that the Authority of the Church itself cannot make it necessary to be believ'd or done; when their great Champion *Bellarmin* has told us in so many Words *, that if the Pope thro' mistake, should command Vice and forbid Vertue, the Church (unless she would sin against Conscience) would be oblig'd to believe that Vice is good and Vertue evil? These things consider'd, I chose to proceed thus: The Advocates of *Rome* will I suppose own, that whatever the Church *might* do, she never has, nor ever will propose or declare any thing as necessary to Salvation, but what is founded either upon Scripture or Apostolical Tradition; for one or both these, is always pleaded as

* Fides Catholica docet, omnem virtutem esse bonam, omne vitium esse malum: Si autem Papa erraret præcipiendo vitia, vel prohibendo virtutes, teneretur Ecclesia credere vitia esse bona, & virtutes malas, nisi vellet contra Conscientiam peccare. Bellarm. De Rom. Pontif. L. 4. C. 5. §. ult.

the ground of what she decrees : Now the Apostles from whom Scripture and these Traditions are said to have come down to us, either knew that those things which the Church takes thence and decrees or proposes as necessary to Salvation, were indeed necessary to Salvation ; or they did not know it : Attend now to the Consequences, which ever way this question is answer'd. If they did know it, they either declar'd it to, or they conceal'd it from, those to whom they preach'd * : Surely it won't be said that they conceal'd any thing that was absolutely necessary to Salvation ; this wou'd be charging them with unfaithfulness to their Trust : Particularly as to *St. Paul*, it wou'd be charging him with high Presumption for pronouncing even an *Angel from Heaven, or any Man upon Earth, accursed*, who shou'd preach any other Gospel †, than that which he and the rest of the Apostles had received themselves and taught to others : It would be giving him the lie for having said to the Elders of the Church of *Ephesus* whom he sent for to *Miletus*, that he had *kept back nothing that was profitable*, and therefore to be sure nothing that was necessary ; and again that he *had not shunned to declare to them all the Counsel of God* ‡. So that I think we may venture to affirm, that neither he nor any other of the Apostles conceal'd any thing which they knew to be necessary to Salvation : Every thing of this sort therefore that they knew, they certainly declar'd ; and if they declar'd it to be necessary to Salvation, I can't imagine what need there can be of the

* Vid. Chilling. Ch. 4. Sect. 18. p. m. 144, 145. † Gal. 1. 8, 9.

‡ Act. 20. 20, 27.

Church's Authoritative proposal and Declaration ; or how there can be any Authority, any where, to decree what shall be necessary to Salvation ; other then that of the Apostles themselves, under Christ the Head of the Church. Let us see now what follows upon supposition the Question should be answer'd the other way ; *i. e.* that the Apostles did *not* know, concerning some of those things grounded upon Scripture, or Tradition proceeding from them, that they were necessary to Salvation ; but which being so in themselves, (tho' *they* did not know it) the Church hath since declar'd them to be so. If this is the Case, I would fain be told how the Church since the Apostles Days, came to know more fully and compleatly what is necessary to Salvation, than the Apostles themselves did : I don't know that she pretends to any new Revelations of this sort ; and if she should pretend to them, we should expect otherguise Proofs of their coming from God, than I think her able to produce : And yet I cannot devize how the Church of *Rome* should come to know more than the Apostles, but by new Revelation. I can think of but one possible way of evading the force of this Reasoning, and that is so poor an one that it scarce deserves to be regarded : It is thus ; that the Church neither knows, nor pretends to know, better then the Apostles what is necessary to Salvation ; but the Apostles might know several things, which tho' they were not necessary to Salvation in their Days, would become necessary in after Times ; and therefore took Care to hand them down to the Church by Tradition, that she might exercise her Authority in proposing

proposing and declaring them to be necessary to Salvation at such Times and in such Circumstances, as she in her great Prudence and Infallible Judgment thought fit. But let us consider; Things necessary to Salvation at one time and not at another? Necessary in our Days, and not so in the Days of the Apostles? Necessary to Christians of later Ages, and not so to the primitive Christians? Sure this cannot be true: I always thought that to be the Christian *Faith, which was once* (and at once) *delivered to the Saints* * by Christ and his Apostles. But to let that pass: If this was the case, methinks the Apostles should have taken care to leave it upon record, or at least to have given us some Hint in Scripture, that more would be necessary to Salvation in after times than was then: And yet I cannot find any thing like this (but a great deal to the contrary) in all the New Testament. But it may be, though Scripture says nothing of this sort, Tradition does; and that you know, serves their Purpose full as well: I do not remember ever yet to have heard of any such Tradition; but if ever I should, it will appear to me so very unlikely to have proceeded from the Apostles, that I shall strongly suspect it of Forgery, and demand very clear Proofs of its Genuineness, before I give Credit to it. I go on to the fifth and last Proposition.

V. That the Church has Authority to judge and determine in all Controversies relating to matters of Faith; and that Christians are obliged to be determined by, and submit to, her Judgment and Decision. I need not spend your time in proving that such Authority is claim'd in behalf of the Church: Coun-

* Jude, ver. 3.

cils have so often, and Popes do so continually exercise it ; calling all those Hereticks and accursed (and as far as they have it in their Power treating them as such) who oppose the Church's Decrees, or who, in any Controversies of Faith which arise, decline her Judgment, and refuse submission to her Determinations ; that there can be no need of farther Evidence. Let us see how this Claim is supported : By much the same sort of Proofs (we shall find) as the former ; particularly the third, To interpret and give the Sense of Scripture, which has no certain Sense till she fixes it : and from what was said in Confutation of that, this before us might sufficiently be disproved : So that I shall need to say the less upon it here.

Briefly thus : If they can but persuade you to take three Steps with them (they are pretty large ones indeed) the Point will be proved : There must be a Judge of Controversies ; Scripture is not fit to be, nor can possibly be, that Judge ; the Church and she alone is fit for that Office, and invested with this Authority, by Christ her invisible Head ; and therefore she has this Authority, and is in the right to exercise and employ it. That there must be a Judge of Controversies, meaning thereby a living, ay and an infallible one ; they all affirm with the utmost Confidence : Their Proofs of which will be considered presently. That Scripture is not fit to be, cannot possibly be, this Judge, they are very positive ; nor will we contradict them, if they mean a *living* and infallible Judge, according to the strict meaning of that Word : But then we say, that these Scriptures are very fit, nay the fittest thing in the World, to be the Rule by which Christians should judge and determine all Disputes concerning Matters
of

of Faith ; as will no doubt be proved to you in the next Discourse. Well, but the Church, *i. e.* (for so they mean) the Pope, or a Council, or the Pope presiding in a Council, and confirming its Decrees, is fit to be, and endowed with Infallibility that it may be, this Judge of Controversies. That it has no such Infallibility shall be proved hereafter : and that she is so far from being the only fit Judge, as not to be at all fit for that Office, * is plain from hence ; that in all these Controversies she is a party ; and her Power and Authority, her Temporal Grandeur and Interest, are so nearly concerned in them, that it is not to be expected she should exercise this Office with Equity and Impartiality. And if I had time for it I could shew you, that from the time she first began to claim this authoritative and infallible Judgment, she has us'd it in so corrupt and arbitrary a manner, as has quite forfeited her Reputation for Honesty and Integrity ; and as must effectually discourage all who are not in her Interests, from submitting to her Tribunal.

You have now heard the Claims of the Church of *Rome*, for Authority in matters of Faith ; You have heard too, some Part of what we have to say (for all could not be said in this compass of Time) for the Confutation of them. If, wondering at the Exorbitancy of these Claims, you should ask, How she could ever have the Insolence to make them ? I

* *Quærendi sunt Judices : Si Christiani de utraque parte dari non possunt ; quia studiis veritas impeditur. De foris quærendus est Judex : Si Paganus, non potest nosse Christiana secreta. Si Judæus, inimicus est Christiani Baptismatis : Ergo in terris de hac re nullum poterit reperiri judicium ; de cælo quærendus est judex. Sed ut quid pulsamus ad cælum, cum habeamus hic in Evangelio Testamentum ?* *Optat. Milev. ad. Parm. L. 5. p. 100. Ed. Lutet. 1676. Fol.*

take the true Account of the Matter to be thus : That between Scripture and the Church of *Rome*, there is a most irreconcilable Difference : Both cannot possibly be in the right : If Scripture be true, many of *her* Doctrines must be false ; great part of her Worship must be idolatrous ; many of her Practices absurd and superstitious ; and her whole Power and Form of Government usurp'd, arbitrary and tyrannical. She seems therefore to have put on a bold Face, and to have resolved, that Scripture shall have no more Authority, no other Meaning, than she is graciously pleased to allow ; and if any thing, not to be met with in Scripture, is found necessary to defend her Cause, and justify her Tyranny †, Tradition shall be applied to, to furnish it out : Tradition which she can forge, alter, and make to say just what she pleases.

I go on now to the other Point, INFALLIBILITY. Their Pretence to which is in itself so monstrously insolent and absurd ; so utterly void of all solid Proof ; so plainly contradictory to History and indisputable Facts ; such a barefac'd Attempt to impose upon the Reason and common Sense of Mankind, and to bring them into a State of the most abject Slavery ; that it is really wonderful (to those who are not acquainted with the History of that Church, and the gradual Advances it made in Demands of this sort) how it should ever enter into the Heads of mortal Men, to lay Claim to it. And yet

† Cum enim ex Scripturis arguuntur (*sc.* hæretici) in accusationem convertuntur ipsarum Scripturarum, quasi non recte habeant, neque sint ex auctoritate, et quia varie sunt dictæ, et quia non possit ex his inveniri Veritas, ab his qui nesciant *Traditionem*. Non enim per Literas traditam illam, sed per vivam vocem, & seq. *Iren. contra Hæc. L. 5. C. 2. Ed. Massuet. p. 174.*

the Fact is indisputably true ; they have long claimed it ; they continue to do so ; their whole Fabrick of Authority rests upon this Claim, and falls when it is confuted ; so that I should be thought to spend your Time needlessly, if I were to set about a laboured Proof of it. *Cressy* indeed, a Profelyte from the Church of *England* to Popery, in the last Century, seems to have been sick of the Word, and to have wish'd he could fairly have got rid of it : He tells us, *No such Word can be found in any Council : That he saw no Necessity that ever Protestants should have heard it named, much less press'd with so much Earnestness, as (he owns) it has been, in their Books of Controversy : That the Word Infallibility had been combated by Chillingworth, with too great Success, which therefore he wishes were forgotten or laid aside † ; and intimates it as his Opinion, that the just Authority of the Church might do without it. The poor Man seem'd to have some little remains of Modesty when he wrote this ; but it is highly probable, that his new Masters school'd him severely for talking at this rate ; for in an Appendix to an after Edition of his Book, he unsays it all again, by telling us, That the Church can neither deceive nor be deceived ; and that Authority and Infallibility in the Church, are in Effect all one ; for to say that the Church hath Authority to oblige all Christians to receive her Doctrines, and withal to say she is fallible, is Extremity of Injustice and Tyranny **. But whether *Cressy* had ever made this Recantation or no ; The Church of Rome is so well appriz'd, that her Au-

† Exomolog. Ch. 40. §. 3. p. m. 284.

* Exomol. Append. C. 5.

thority can never be supported without the Claim of Infallibility ; that as she does not seem at all disposed to give it up, so I am under no Apprehension of their reckoning it a Calumny, when we charge them with making this Claim. And indeed, neither *Cressy*, nor what I have quoted from him, had been worth mentioning on this Occasion, were it not that I might warn you of those Methods, which possibly the present Agents for the Church of *Rome* among us may take, to gain Profelytes : I mean representing their Cause, and the Doctrines of the Church of *Rome*, in the softest and most favourable manner, and concealing as much as they can the most shocking Parts of it ; that uncautious People may swallow it the more easily. This was manifestly *Cressy's* Intention, and it is not at all unlikely, that others are now making use of the same Arts. If you should happen to meet with any of them, who should be for laying aside this shocking Word *Infallibility*, while they are recommending their Religion to you ; pray ask them, Whether they, or any Papist, can or dare own that their Church has or may err in matters of Faith ? If they should tell you that their Councils do not use this Word, and that therefore they need not ; ask them, Whether no Council ever decreed, that the Church *non potest errare*, cannot err ? and if so, what is the Difference between its being impossible for her to err, and being infallible ? Ask them, whether their greatest Doctors have not told us, that were it not for the Infallibility of the Church, their Faith could have no Foundation, nor their Religion any Certainty ? Nay, Whether the Council of *Basil*

fil has not told us, that if once that pernicious Error were admitted, that *Councils may err*, the whole Catholick Faith would totter. And to say Truth, this is talking (though falsely and impudently) yet consistently at least; whereas those (if really there be any such) who tell us, that Authority will do of it self, though they should drop Infallibility; not only contradict the known Sense of their Church, but in effect give up its Power, and destroy the Foundations upon which its Grandeur and Tyranny subsists. And accordingly in supporting those *authoritative Claims* mentioned under the former Head, they always have recourse to the Church's Infallibility: a Persuasion of which does more to satisfy their Votaries of the Justice of their Claims, and to dispose them blindly to submit to them, than all their other Proofs put together: For in short, the whole of their Faith is resolv'd, into the unerring *Authority* and *Infallibility* of their Church: So that, besides what has been already said, if I can (as I verily think I shall) confute their Pretensions to the latter, it will be a farther (and it may be a more striking) Proof, than any I have yet offer'd, of the Absurdity and Impudence of the former. To this end, and that we may the better understand what is precisely the Point in debate, it will be of use, in the First Place.

I. To state the notion of *Infallibility*: How far, and with respect to what things, the Church of *Rome* lays claim to it. It will, I suppose, be granted me, that he who does not know absolutely every thing, may possibly be mistaken in some things: since therefore it will be allow'd me that Omniscience

ence, or the knowing absolutely every thing that is knowable, is the Prerogative of God alone, and which no Man or number of Men can (or indeed does) lay claim to ; It will follow that the Church is not absolutely, and with respect to all things Infallible : To do them justice, they don't pretend that she is. The Question therefore is, how far, and with respect to what things does she pretend to be Infallible ? With one Voice they will all tell you that she is infallible in matters of Faith : A few of them (I mean the *Jesuits*, in the famous dispute between them, and the *Jansenists*) maintain'd, and would fain have got it to have been settled and universally own'd, that the Church (*i. e.* the Pope, for so the *Jesuits* meant) was Infallible with relation to matters of *Fact* also. Again : They will all of them (I think) own, that tho' the Church is Infallible in her decrees concerning Faith and Manners, yet that she may become (and actually has at some times, been) greatly corrupt in Discipline and Practice ; and that both her Head and her Members may be thus corrupted. With respect to this last concession, I cannot help observing, that to any Man of plain common Sense, there appears to be a manifest inconsistency in it. The Church is Infallible in its decrees with relation to *Matters of Faith*, and *Manners* : *i. e.* things to be believ'd, and things to be practis'd : As to the former, *Matters of Faith* ; it not only decrees aright ; but it always actually believes right too : For Error, or varying the least rittle from what the Church has decreed to be believ'd ; is Heresy : and Heresy *ipso facto* cuts a Man off from the Church, and excludes all hope of Salvation

vation: But the Case is (it seems) otherwise with respect to *Manners*; for tho' the Church does, and cannot but, decree as infallibly upon this Head, as with respect to *Matters of Faith*; yet she herself may become corrupt in her Manners, and *Practise* many things (tho' she can never *believe* any thing) contrary to her own decrees. What should make this Difference I cannot devize; or why a mistake in the understanding, should more effectually cut a Man off from the Communion of the Church, and the hope of Salvation, than the wickedness of his Heart and Life. I am sure St. *Paul* tells us, that tho' he had the Gift of Prophecy, and understood all mysteries, and all Knowledge; nay, tho' he had Faith so that he could remove Mountains, yet if he had no Charity, he should be nothing *. The Charity he there speaks of, is on all Hands acknowledg'd to be the Source of holy Obedience and regular Practice: Whatever else I have, if I want this, I am nothing; and therefore one would think, not Infallible: And why the Church of *Rome* after having claim'd *Infallibility*, does not rub her forehead, and claim *Impeccability* too, I am at a loss to know; I think verily they might as justly, and with as good Proof from Reason and Scripture claim the latter, as the former. And so with respect to the distinction just now mention'd, of Matters of Faith, and Matters of Fact; I have never yet met with any sufficient Reasons, why those who allow the Infallibility of the Church of *Rome* as to the first, should disallow it as to the last: I can see indeed how it might come to pass, that in the dispute between

* 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

the Jesuits and Jansenists, the different Views and Interests of the two Parties, might dispose the former to stickle as warmly for the Pope's Infallibility in Matters of Fact, as the latter did against it: But as I cannot tell whether, if it had not been for such an opposition of Interests and Views, this Point when once started, would not have been roundly carry'd in favour of his Holiness; so for ought I know, if a favourable opportunity should offer, the claim may be reviv'd again, and the Church be decreed to be as Infallible in Matters of Fact, as she pretends to be in Matters of Faith: Sure I am, that time was, when there was as little likelihood that any Christian Church should ever pretend to the latter; as there is now, that the Church of *Rome* may some time or other, lay claim to the former. But since this is not yet the Case, and that I may not be thought to dispute against any claim, other than what our Adversaries are universally agreed in making, I will confine myself to their *Infallibility in Matters of Faith*. Upon hearing such an extraordinary privilege claim'd, it is natural to ask those who pretend to it, Pray where is it to be found? Who is entrusted with it? To whom are we to apply for an infallible Interpretation of Scripture, and for an infallible decision of all Controversies? The having this Privilege is not a whit of more Importance than the knowing where it is lodged; nor can it possibly be of any Use, till it is determined and known who is in Possession of it. If God has appointed such an infallible Teacher and Judge, if he has commanded us upon Pain of Damnation, to hearken to him, and to be determined by him; no Man alive

alive can doubt but that he has taken Care to make him so conspicuous and remarkable, that it shall be impossible to mistake him ; or at least that there are means sufficiently plain and certain, by which we may know, without any doubt, who and where he is. Suppose his Majesty should tell his Subjects, that he had appointed a Lord Chancellor and twelve Judges, to hear and determine all Causes belonging severally to their Cognizance ; would it not appear very strange, if he should conceal their Names, or leave us no possible Method of knowing who the Persons were whom he had appointed and commissioned to execute these Offices ? And yet upon Enquiry, this will be found to be the very Case before us : For our Adversaries themselves, are so far from being agreed where it is lodged, that they are of different and inconsistent Opinions about it. Give me leave to ask (in Archbishop Tillotson's * Words) " Can any Man think that this Privilege was at
 " first conferred upon the Church of *Rome*, and
 " that Christians in all Ages did believe it, and had
 " constant Recourse to it for determining their
 " Differences ; and yet that that very Church which
 " enjoy'd and us'd it so long, should now be at a
 " Loss where to find it ? Nothing could have fallen out more unluckily, than that there should
 " be such Differences among them about that,
 " which they pretend to be the only Means of
 " ending all Differences". For you are to know, that in the Church of *Rome* it self, there are several Competitors for this *Infallibility* : Some of

* Vol. I. Sermon. 11. on 1 Cor. iii. 15.

them will tell you that it is in the Pope alone, and not in any General Council ; Others that it is in a General Council only, and not in the Pope ; And others, that is in neither Pope nor Council singly, but in both together ; *i. e.* That when a General Council is called by the Pope, when he presides in it, either in Person or by his Legates, and when he confirms it's Decrees, then they are infallibly true and absolutely binding : And yet there is a fourth Opinion, that these Decrees are not infallible and binding after all, till the Church hath universally owned and received them. Whom, or what are we to believe in this Case ? For these Opinions are so inconsistent, that if you suppose any one of them to be true, all the rest must be false. But what if after all, an Expedient may be found out to reconcile these different Opinions ; or at least to make Mens Minds easy, even though they subsist. *Chillingworth* having urg'd the very Difficulty we are now upon, home on the Church of *Rome* ; *Cressy* takes upon him to solve it ; and he goes about it in the following Manner. Hereto I answer (says he) *That there is no Need at all of an Answer, since the Objection answers it self : For by saying, there are Variety of Opinions among Catholicks, acknowledged for such even while they differ, it follows, that the Objector is not obliged to submit to that Judge which any Catholick refuses † : i. e.* (for so it must hence follow) Since there are many in the Church of *Rome*, own'd as Members of that Catholick Church, who deny that *Infallibility* is in the Pope ; many

others who deny that it is in a General Council, and so of the rest ; you are not obliged to believe that it is in any one of them : Which (to my Understanding) is leaving us at Liberty whether we will believe it is any where : For if it be not in some one or more of these Competitors for it, I cannot imagine where it should be ; for there is no Body else that puts in for it : And if it be no where, or if no Body can tell me who has it, I shall conclude that they have it not ; nay, that there is no such thing to be had. After having given this wise Reason why the Difficulty needed no Answer, (by which you see the whole Cause is given up) He proceeds to add two other Answers ; The whole Meaning of both which amounts to no more than this : That though Catholics are not perfectly of a Mind, where their *Infallibility* is ; yet they are all agreed, that their Church has it : And if we Protestants will but be so good natur'd, as to take this upon their Word, they will leave us at our Liberty to lodge it either in the Pope, as the Jesuits do ; or in a General Council, as the *Gallican* Church does ; or in both together, as many others do. In short, in any of them, in all of them, or in none of them (for there are good Catholics who deny it of every one of them). Do but believe that we have it, and submit to the Orders and Decrees which it issues out ; and we will desire no more of you. Must not these Men have lost their Senses, to give us such an Answer ; or think that we have lost ours, and so may be satisfy'd with

it? *Infallibility* in the Church, and yet it is neither in the Head, nor in the Members! neither in the Church Virtual, nor Representative, nor diffusive! at least, you need not believe it is in any of them. It is just as if I should say, That there is somewhere in the World a very great and powerful Kingdom, distinguished from all others by some one peculiar Advantage, which none of the rest have: And being asked, Pray in what Quarter of the World is it? I should answer, That though the whole World is divided into *Europe, Asia, Africa, and America*, yet the Kingdom I talk of, is in no one, or more of these. It must be own'd, that thus far, at least, the Church of *Rome* is in the right, to require implicit Faith, blind Submission and Obedience, of her Votaries; since no Man with his Eyes open, can help boggling at such Absurdities.

It will be said (it may be) that *Cressy* went the wrong Way to work, in answering this Difficulty; that by the Concessions he has made, he has well nigh betrayed the Cause: That those who understand themselves better, take Care to fix this *Infallibility* somewhere; and though they do indeed differ very widely in their Opinions about it, yet they are all very certain of the Truth of their Opinions severally. I have already enumerated four of them: And since it is (I think) impossible to devise a Fifth, if I can prove to you that all these four are false; it must surely follow, That they have no such Thing as *Infallibility* among them.

i. Then,

1. Then, The *Jesuits*; almost all their several Orders of *Monks*; great numbers of their learned Doctors; and I believe the greater part of the common People among them; are of the Opinion, that the Pope alone is *infallible*: As I could prove to you, (if I had Time) from a great Number of their Authors. But because this will not be deny'd, I will content my self with proving, that this Opinion cannot be true. For several of their Popes have actually erred; and that in Matters professedly relating to the Faith; acting as Popes, and pronouncing or decreeing *ex Cathedrâ*. Pope *Adrian VI.* was so honest as to own that Popes are fallible. If he said true, the Cause is given up: If he was mistaken, then he himself at least, though a Pope, was not *infallible*. Consult *Platina* in his History of the Lives of the Popes I am going to mention, and you will find that some or other of them must have been mistaken. *Stephen VI.* annulled and rescinded the Decrees of *Formosus I.* *John X.* annulled those of *Stephen*, and restored those of *Formosus*. *Romanus I.* abrogated the Decrees of *Stephen*: And *Sergius III.* had such an abhorrence for *Formosus*, and all that he did as Pope, that he obliged Priests whom he had ordained, to be re-ordained. Their own Canon Law tells us, That *Nicholas I.* * decreed, it was not fit for Clergymen to bear Arms: Compare this with what *Urban II.* *Boniface VIII.* and several other Popes have advized, or decreed, or practiced, and then judge whether some or other of them must not have been

* Gratian. Distinct. 50. C. 5.

mistaken. I could give you many more Instances, but these are enough : For upon the Principles of those whom I am now opposing, every Pope must have been infallible ; and if it be proved concerning any one of them that he erred, there is no Reason to believe that any of them were *infallible*.

It would be easy to produce several Instances wherein the same Pope has contradicted himself : I'll mention but one : *Martin V.* confirm'd the decree of the Council of *Constance*, which set a General Council above the Pope : And yet he afterwards publish'd a Bull forbidding all Appeals from the Pope to a General Council. Unless Infallibility can reconcile Contradictions, he must have been fallible in one or the other of these Cases.

Nay, I can go farther, and prove to you, not only that many of their Popes have been the most wicked and profligate Wretches that were ever Born, (this they own, but tell us, it is well enough consistent with their Infallibility) but that they have believ'd and Taught and Patroniz'd, what the Church of *Rome* itself has declar'd to be Heresy. If *Athanasius* * is to be credited, Pope *Liberius* for fear of Death (with which he was threatned) subscrib'd to Arianism. And this account is confirm'd both by St. *Hilary* † and St. *Jerome* ‡. *Tertulian* || tells us concerning one of the Bishops of *Rome*, (it was I think Pope *Anicetus*) that he own'd the Prophecies of *Montanus*, *Prisca* and *Maximilla*.

* Ep. ad solit. Vit. agentes, p. 837. Ed. Par. 1627.

† Hilar. in Frag. col. 426.

‡ Hieron. Catal. vir. illust.

|| Tertul. adv. Prax. p. m. 634. C.

Honorius not only defended the Heresy of the *Monothelites*, but was condemn'd by three General Councils, every one of them confirm'd by the Pope. *John XXIII.* was ‡ charg'd at the Council of *Constance*, with the blackest and most enormous Crimes, under 70 Articles. Fifty of which were read and prov'd, and declar'd to be publick and notorious. And tho' his denying the Immortality of the Soul, was (I think) one of those Articles, which (out of respect to the apostolick See) was not allow'd to be expressly urg'd against him; yet I do not find that any body attempted to clear him of that Charge. The Council itself in their Citation expressly charges him with *Heresy*, *Schism*, *Simony*, as well as other Crimes, and afterwards actually depos'd him. This is the Man concerning whom the Emperor (who was there present) declar'd that the whole Council unanimously own'd him for a true Pope, before his Deposition. Was *Gregory* the Great infallible, when he condemn'd the Title of Universal Bishop as Prophanes and Antichristian? the very Title the Popes of *Rome* now claim. Or was *Gelasius* Infallible *, when he condemn'd (what the Church of *Rome* has since decreed) Communion in one kind, and call'd it *Sacrilegious*? But enough of this sort of Proof: If the Gentlemen we have to do with in this dispute, would suffer us to argue with them on the Principles of Reason and common Sense, (as the

‡ L. Enfant Hist. de Conc. de Constance, p. 141. 175, 220. Ed. 4^o. Amst. 1714.

* Gratian. de Consecrat. Dist. 2. C. 12.

rest of Mankind submit to be treated) it would be easy to shew from these Principles, that there is scarce any one Proposition in all the World more incredible, than that all the Bishops of *Rome* have been Infallible. To prove this there needs nothing more, than a brief representation what sort of Persons, Popes (at least for a great many Centuries last past) have generally been; how they are chosen; and how they often proceed in their decrees and decisions concerning Matters of Faith. The Qualifications most regarded in a Candidate for the Papal Chair, are, not Piety and Vertue, nor Learning and sound Knowledge in the Doctrines of Christianity; For many of them have been monsters in wickedness, and exceedingly ignorant as to these things: But, a deep Skill in Politicks and Canon Law; in Dispensations, and Beneficiary Matters; Excommunications, and Appeals: And then, the older the better; as being the more likely to die soon, and make way for others, of whom there are always enow gaping after this Dignity. Well, when any one or more such Candidates are pitch'd upon as the Electors (or those under whose influence they are) think will best promote their Interests, and answer their Purposes; how does the choice proceed? Is it (as is pretended) under the Influence and Direction of the Spirit of God, or is it by trick and artifice, and under the Influence of a Spirit of Faction and Cabal? Let any Man read even their own accounts of the usual methods of proceeding in these Cases, and then Judge. Such a Pope; thus created; sets himself down in his Infallible

lible Chair, and is to determine authoritatively a matter of Faith; how does he proceed? If he takes, what our Adversaries themselves will own to be, the wisest and safest Course; he consults his Cardinals, or (as the case may happen) calls upon Divines or Canonists, to hear their Opinions; *i. e.* He that is himself *Infallible*, advises with, and borrows Light from those who are *Fallible*; nay, and after all, is (it may be) so unknowing about the affair in question, as not to be able to form a true Judgment, or come to a right Determination upon what he has heard: But as it is his business to pronounce; when he has done so, it's your Duty to receive and submit to his Decree as infallibly true, and binding upon the whole Christian World. What a ridiculous Farce must it be, to behold, what must often have happened at *Rome*; his Holiness with an affair of this sort before him, solicited on the one hand by the Jesuits, on the other by a secret Friend to the *Jansenists*; now by the *Dominicans*, next by the *Franciscans*; all of them in different Interests, and acting from different Views; here an Agent from one temporal Prince, putting the Pope in mind of former Favours and promising new ones; there the Ambassador of another, insisting on his Master's Rights, and threatening hard if he be not oblig'd. I imagine that Popes are as much perplexed and at a loss to know what to do upon such Occasions, as other fallible People are, in like Circumstances; and as he himself could be, if you suppose him stript of his Infallibility. Nay, and I think we may venture to say, that with all their Infallibility about them, Popes have often made Decrees and issued out Bulls, which they have

afterwards found to be wrong, and heartily repented of. — I have been the longer in confuting this Pretence of Infallibility being lodg'd in the Pope alone, because I think it is the prevailing Opinion in the Church of *Rome*. I will be shorter on the rest.

2. Others pretend that *Infallibility* is lodg'd, not in the Pope, but in a General Council only. Thus it was agreed in the Councils of *Constance* and *Basil*; and this is the Opinion of the * *Gallican* Church in general, and of several learned Doctors elsewhere. But this Pretence is (I apprehend) in some respects more absurd and incredible than the former. If I could believe the Infallibility they claim were any where to be found among Men; I should incline rather to expect to find it in some one particular Person, than in a Hundred or five Hundred of them got together, who yet (it is own'd) take them singly, are every Man of them fallible. Is it a whit more likely, that any number of fallible Men should make up an infallible Company; than that any number of Cyphers should make a positive Sum? If *Infallibility* be lodg'd in a General Council only, I would fain know where it is, when there is no General Council subsisting? This is often the case; a Hundred, two Hundred Years have run out, from the breaking up one, to the calling of another: It is now above 170 Years since their last General Council of *Trent*: Nay, the first that was ever called so, was at *Nice* in the Year 325. Where was *Infallibility* during these Intervals? Who, and where was the Church's unerring Guide and Judge of all Controversies? They

* Vid. *Bellarmino* de Rom. Pontif. L. 4. c. 2. §. *Secunda Sententia*, &c.

will not say surely, that the Decrees of former Councils are this unerring Guide and Judge; for besides that the Church had no such Decrees, for the first 300 Years; we might as well take Scripture as the Decrees of Councils, for these purposes. When we Protestants say that Scripture is a sufficient Guide, and the only Rule by which to judge of and determine Controversies in matters of Faith; they tell us no: Scripture is by no means sufficient or fit for this Office; that it is absolutely necessary there should be a living Judge to be apply'd to and consulted upon all Emergencies. Are the Decrees of Councils such a Judge? Are not these as capable of being perverted, and having different Interpretations put upon them, as the Scriptures? If it be said that the Church is in possession of these Decrees and knows the meaning of them, and can determine all Controversies by them; I ask whether she can do it *Infallibly*, and without danger of erring? If it be answered (as it must be) Yes: I ask again, who is meant by this *Church*? It cannot be a General Council; for that we suppose is not subsisting, and therefore can't be apply'd to: It is not the Pope, nor any body else, that can do this infallibly; for that destroys the Supposition we now go upon, that a General Council only is Infallible. ----- I could produce to you the plainest Testimonies of their own Writers, and unanswerable Reasons made use of by them, to prove that *Infallibility* is not lodg'd in General Councils only: I could shew you that if it is lodg'd there, not only these Authors (who yet are held in the highest esteem in that Church) but even the Popes themselves (who you may well think, are not for lodg-

ing Infallibility any where but in themselves) are mistaken : Mistaken did I say ? They must all of them be as very Hereticks, as we Protestants are said to be : For surely nothing can make a Man more so, than denying this Privilege to those who really and only have it : It is rejecting the Judge whom they all pretend to be so necessary, that the Church can't subsist without him ; it is sapping the Foundation of all the Church's boasted Authority, and overthrowing it at once.—I could shew you General Councils, not only decreeing what is false and and directly contrary to Scripture, (tho' that alone is enough to convince us, that they were fallible) but reversing, opposing, and directly contradicting each other's Decrees : so that we may be as certain that General Councils are not Infallible, as that the two Ends of a Contradiction cannot be both true. — If you have ever heard or read any History of them ; how they are call'd ; what sort of Persons they generally consist of ; by what Methods they ordinarily proceed ; and from what sort of Motives they usually act ; you will find little reason to believe them Infallible. So long ago, as *Greg. Nazianzen's* time, pious and peaceable Men were quite out of love with them ; for thus he says, in one of his Epistles, * “ If I must write you the Truth, I am in a Disposition to avoid all Assemblies of Bishops, as having never yet seen a happy end of any one of their Synods or Councils : Nor have I ever found that they do more towards lessening, than to-

* Εχω μὲν ἔτις, εἰ δὲ τ' ἀληθὲς γράφω, ὥστε πάντα σύλλογον θεογένην ἐπισκόπων, ὅτι μηδὲ μίας συνόδου τέλος εἶδον χεῖρόν· μηδὲ λύσιν χεῖρόν· μᾶλλον ἐσχυνίαν, ἢ ἀντίκλιν. Ἄν γὰρ φιλονεικίαι καὶ φιλαρχίαι· ἀλλ' ὅπως μὴτε φορτικὸν ὑπολάβῃς οὕτω γράφοντα· καὶ λόγους κρείττους. κ. τ. λ.
Ad Procop. Ep. 55. Op. Vol. I. p. m. 814. Ed. Par. 1630.

“ wards

“wards heightning any Mischiefs that are com-
 “plain’d of. It may sound harsh to say it; but
 “their Spirit of Contention and Ambition, their
 “Pride and Lust of Power, is such as no Words
 “can express.” By all that ever I have read, I
 don’t find any reason to believe that matters are at
 all mended since his Days. The History of their
 famous Council of *Trent*, has been written by Fa-
 ther *Paul*, and by Cardinal *Pallavicini*, both Mem-
 bers of their own Church: The former of ’em has
 indeed spoken too much plain Truth, to be much
 relish’d at *Rome*; the latter is strongly in the Pope’s
 Interest, and therefore much better approv’d: But
 let any impartial Person read either of ’em, or com-
 pare them together, if he be not sick of the No-
 tion of the Infallibility of General Councils, I am
 grossly mistaken.-----I go on to consider the third
 Opinion.

3. That a Pope * and a General Council together
 are Infallible, *i. e.* that when a General Council is
 call’d by the Pope, when he presides in it either in
 Person or by his Legates, and when he confirms
 its Decrees; then they are infallible: They can’t pos-
 sibly err, and ought to be implicitly submitted to
 and obey’d. But why so? If (as we have shewn,
 and as the Defenders of this Opinion admit) both
 be fallible separately consider’d, I can’t conceive
 how their clubbing together shou’d make them In-
 fallible. This is much the same Absurdity we had
 before, two Cyphers making a Sum. Besides, if
 Infallibility depends upon the Conjunction and
 Agreement of a Pope and a General Council, the
 Church of *Rome* cannot be always in possession

* Bellarm. de Concil. l. 2. c. 2.

of it, because they have not a General Council always subsisting; and it must follow from the Opinion we are now considering, that when the General Council breaks up, Infallibility expires along with it. Not to insist on these Absurdities of this Opinion, I could shew you (if I had time) Decrees of one General Council confirm'd by one Pope, and contradicted, reversed by the same Authority; nay, the self-same Pope first confirming, and afterwards contradicting the Decree of a General Council. I could shew you the Council of *Constance* decreeing that the Laity should receive the Communion in one Kind only, and yet acknowledging that Christ instituted it in both Kinds; and this Decree confirm'd by Pope *Martin V.* And the Council of *Trent* † confirm'd by Pope *Pius IV.* decreeing that Divine Service should be perform'd in the *Latin* (i. e. an unknown) Tongue, in direct contradiction to St. *Paul's* Doctrine, 1 *Cor.* xiv. But to wave all this, it may be prov'd, I think, to a Demonstration, that if the Pope and the Council separately be both of them fallible, they can't both together be infallible; nor can any Decrees of the latter, tho' confirm'd by the former, be known to be more infallibly true, than if both were as fallible jointly, as they are own'd to be separately. For consider, the Infallibility can't come from the Council, that is own'd to be fallible; its Decrees therefore may be true or false, and the Council in the right, or mistaken, just as it happens. Well, when the Council has past the Decree, and so done its work, it comes to his *Holiness* to be confirm'd; but can he who is ac-

† Conc. Trident. Sess. 22. C. 8.

knowledg'd

knowledg'd to be fallible, infallibly assure me that the Council has not err'd in making this Decree? 'Tis manifestly impossible. I will only add as to this Head, that if either the Pope himself, or the Church of *Rome* in general, are thoroughly persuaded that a General Council confirm'd by a Pope, is really *infallible*; nothing can be more unaccountable, than the Reluctance which the Popes generally shew to the calling a General Council, and the Terror and Fright they are in, when they have the Prospect of its assembling. Is then the boasted Privilege of so little Value, that to keep the Pope easy and in good Humour, the Church must be content to do without it? With what Difficulty, and after how long and earnest Sollicitations was the Council of *Trent* itself obtain'd, even tho' Emperor, Kings, Princes, in a manner the whole Body of the Church, most ardently desir'd it, and thought there was no other Expedient to come at Peace and Truth, and a Reformation of the Church both in its Head and in its Members?—I go on,

4. Others are of opinion that Infallibility is only in the Church Universal; *i. e.* (I suppose) diffusively in the whole mystical Body of Christ consisting of all its Members here upon Earth: So as that, though neither Pope, nor Council, nor any particular Church, are infallible; yet when their Decrees are received and submitted to, by the Catholick Church, they then become infallibly true, and absolutely binding. This has been the Opinion of a considerable Number of great and learned Men in that Church; and this is (it must be own'd) talking more modestly than the others do; though as to any of the purposes for which *Infallibility*

libility is claim'd, this Opinion is as ridiculous as any of the rest. If all that they mean is, that the universal Church and every Member of it, cannot err in Matters absolutely necessary to Salvation; I don't know that Protestants have any occasion to contradict or deny it. But then if this be own'd, it is not because we apprehend that either any, or all the Members of the Church together, are infallible; but because we take our Saviour's Promise, that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against his church*, to be an Assurance to us that he will have a Church in this World as long as the World itself lasts; and because those who err in any of those things which are absolutely necessary to Salvation, do for that very reason cease to be Members of that Church. But then after all, if this is all the *Infallibility* which is claim'd, it is nothing to the purpose; nor will it by any means answer the great End and Design for which it is claim'd. Our Adversaries are perpetually ringing in our Ears, the absolute Necessity of an infallible Interpreter of Scripture, and Judge of Controversies to whom we may have recourse on all Emergencies. Is the universal Church such an one? Can all the Members of it meet to consult and determine? It must not be said that they can meet in a General Council by their Representatives, for this would not answer the end, unless the Church universal could impart her *Infallibility* to her Representatives; which I believe will not be said; nay, and I have prov'd already, that the Church Representative has not *Infallibility*.

I have gone through the four several Opinions maintain'd by different Persons in the Communion of the Church of *Rome*, concerning the Seat of Infallibility,

Infallibility, where and in whom this wonderful Privilege is lodg'd. Since these have (I think) all been fairly examin'd and fully confuted, and no other is (that I know of) pretended to, or can be devis'd; I would now conclude that they have no such Privilege any where among them; were it not that they tell us, they have plain Texts of Scripture, exprefs Promises of Christ himself, assuring them that the true Church is infallible, and that their Church is the true one: and if so, the thing is certainly true, and may justly be claim'd, notwithstanding this Difference of Opinions where it is lodg'd, and all the Difficulties and Absurdities with which those Opinions are severally charg'd. What though it be so doubtful, whether it is Pope, or Council, or both together, or the whole Church that is infallible; and so difficult to answer the Objections that are rais'd, against any or all of them being so; if Christ has promis'd it, and the Scripture says it, no Man ought to deny it.

In answer to all this, it would I think be sufficient to say; That it is very hard to believe our Saviour should give Promises to his Church that can do it no good: That the Church is never the better for its *Infallibility*, if no body can tell who has it: And that the appointing an infallible Interpreter and Judge, can answer no manner of purpose, till it is known who is this Judge. But waving all this, and that we may not be thought to decline the Force of any of their Arguments, especially of any such as are taken from Scripture, allow me to examine this somewhat particularly.

I begin with observing that a Proof of this Sort, is arguing in a vicious Circle; and an absurd begging that the thing may be granted, which ought

to be prov'd. For if you ask, how they know from express Scripture, or good Consequence from it, that the Church is infallible? The Answer must be, that the Church has interpreted Scripture to this Sense; and upon their own Principles you could never have known that this is the true Sense of Scripture, if the Church had not so interpreted it: Well, but why am I bound to believe, and be satisfy'd with the Church's Interpretation? The Answer is, because the Church is infallible. Can any thing be more ridiculous?

Suffer me but to put on, for a moment, the Church of *Rome's* bold Front, and to reason upon her avowed Principles; and I undertake, by the self-same Argument, to prove that I myself am infallible, nay, and that no-body is so besides myself. Thus: St. *John*, speaking of Christians, says, *Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things,* 1 *John* ii. 20. Upon quoting this Text, for this Purpose, I shall, no doubt, be ask'd, 1st, How this proves me infallible? And 2^{dly}, Since it seems to speak as much of other Christians as of me, How it proves me *only* to be infallible? Now tho' either of these Questions will, I confess, puzzle me grievously, unless you allow me to borrow his Holiness's Confidence, and to make use of some of his Principles; yet thus furnish'd, I assure you I have my Answer ready. For, to take no Notice at present, that this Text imports Infallibility, as much (for ought I can see) as any other in the Bible: Thus I reply, (and it is exactly what the Church of *Rome* has the Modesty to say for herself.) I am the only authoritative Interpreter of Scripture; and as no body can be sure of the true Sense of it, till I tell it them; I now declare the true meaning
of

of this Text to be, that I am infallible. Well, but how does all this prove that I *only* am infallible? Just as well as any other Texts of Scripture, which speak as much of any other Christians as of those of the *Romish* Communion; prove that the Church of *Rome* is infallible: And if you pretend to contradict me, I will rub my Forehead over again, and tell you once more, I am the authoritative Interpreter of Scripture, and that the meaning of this Text is, not only that I am infallible, but that I *only* am so: And let me but find Fools enough to believe it, and stand by me in the Defence of it; and who will dare to dispute or oppose my Claim.---Having thus made use of their Confidence and their Principles, to answer the Purposes for which I assum'd them; I am now very well content to lay both aside, and leave them in the Possession of the right Owners.

But tho' what I have been saying manifestly proves the Absurdity of their quoting Scriptures in proof of their Church's Infallibility, yet for the sake of those, who paying a just Regard to their Bibles, are willing to believe any thing they find prov'd by Arguments taken from thence; it wou'd not be amiss to consider the Texts themselves, (the most considerable of them at least) and what sort of Proof they afford of the Church's Infallibility.

* *Bellarmino* quotes in Proof of the Pope's Infallibility, those Words of our Saviour to St. *Peter*, *Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy Faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.* Luke xxii. 31, 32.

* De Rom. Pont. L. 4. c. 2. init.

He tells us, the true Meaning of this Text is, that our Lord obtain'd two Privileges for St. *Peter*, 1st, That he himself, how strongly soever he might be tempted by the Devil, should never lose true Faith. The 2d Privilege was, that neither *Peter* himself, as Pontiff of *Rome*, nor any other of his Successors in that See, should ever teach any thing contrary to the true Faith. The first of these Privileges (says *Bellarmino*) did not, it may be, descend to *Peter's* Successors; but the second doubtless did. To prove which, he quotes seven Popes, *Theophylact*, *Peter Chrysologus*, and *Bernard*; and this is all the Proof he alledges. Now tho' these Authors were all of his mind, (which yet, upon reading what he quotes from 'em, I think they are not) it is surely a strange way of proving the Pope's *Infallibility*, that Popes themselves have said they were *infallible*: And his three other Authors come too late to be credited in a Question of this Importance. And yet after all, his Proof that this is the meaning of the Text before us, is not so weak, but that the Proof that this cannot be the meaning of it, is as strong. The time was now at hand, when our Saviour was to be betray'd into the Hands of his Enemies, and by them to be put to Death: This he knew would prove a severe Trial of that Faith and Trust which his Disciples had repos'd in him. He knew St. *Peter's* forward warm Temper, which (tho' he meant honestly) dispos'd him to trust too much to the strength of his own Resolutions, and not to watch so carefully, and pray so earnestly for divine Aids, as he ought to have done. Our Lord foresaw (it shou'd seem) the Temptation with which St. *Peter*

Peter would be assaulted, and that he would succumb under it. Thus the Case stood when our Saviour spake these Words: Addressing himself to *Peter*, as the Person most in danger, he tells him, That his approaching Sufferings and Death, wou'd be made use of by Satan as a strong Temptation to persuade him and his Brethren to forsake and deny their Master: So that they all needed our Lord's Prayers upon this occasion, and no doubt he pray'd for them. But as for you *Peter*, (says our Lord) whose Trial will be peculiarly strong, and whose Temper of Mind exposes you to more than ordinary Danger in the time of Trial; I have prayed for you especially, *that your Faith may not fail*: That, tho' you may be weak and timorous enough to deny that you belong to me, or have had any thing to do with me; yet that you may not wholly forsake my Service, and renounce the Profession of my Religion. This is the plain Design and Meaning of the Words; which were spoken to St. *Peter*, and belong to him only: Nor is there the least Shadow of Reason to suppose, that they at all relate to Popes; St. *Peter's* Successors, as they are call'd. If they assure us of the Indefectibility of the Faith of all his Successors; I would fain know, why not of his Successors in the See of *Antioch*, (where he is said to have been Bishop seven Years, before he was Bishop of *Rome*) as well as of those in the See of *Rome*? And yet placing *Infallibility* at *Antioch*, as well as at *Rome*, would spoil all. I will only add, that if the *Infallibility* of *Peter*, and his pretended Successors, is assur'd to us by our Saviour's praying that *his Faith might not fail*; then every Man whose Faith fails not,

not, must be *infallible*: And since it has been prov'd, concerning several of St. *Peter's* Successors, that their Faith has actually fail'd, (even in the Sense in which the Papists themselves understand these Words) it certainly follows, that these Words of Christ to *Peter*, neither do, nor were ever design'd to assure us of the Infallibility of his Successors.

Your time will not allow me, to consider particularly the Texts of Scripture which our Adversaries urge, to prove this favourite and capital Point: If it wou'd, I think I could easily shew you it wou'd be difficult to find any one of the wildest Enthusiasts that has ever appear'd in the World, quoting Scriptures in confirmation of his Dreams, more absurdly, more impertinently, or to a Sense more foreign to that which the Holy Ghost design'd, than the Papists do, when they go about to prove their Infallibility thence. Let me only put you in mind, that many of the Texts alledg'd by them relate to the Church in general, as consisting of all true Believers; and therefore will serve as well to prove that every particular good Christian is *infallible*, as that the Pope or the Church of *Rome* is so. Others of 'em are design'd to represent the Duty of the Ministers of the Christian Church, and the Ends for which that Office was instituted; without designing at all to intimate, that the Ministers wou'd never neglect their Duty, and swerve from the design of their Office: And yet without supposing this last, the Arguments drawn from hence, will all be found to be sophistical and fallacious. Lastly, others of them mean nothing more than to recommend to private Christians the

shewing

shewing that Respect and Regard to their Ministers, which is due to 'em so long as they continue diligent and faithful in the Execution of their Office; without so much as hinting at any *Dominion*, or *Infallibility*, or *Authority*, (properly so called) that Christ has conferr'd upon 'em. Let these things be remember'd, and applied to the Texts quoted by the Church of *Rome* to prove the Point we are upon; and they will be found to be the Keys, which will not only open to us the true meaning of such Texts, but effectually convince us, there is not any one of them that proves their Infallibility.

There is one thing more very pertinent to our present purpose, which deserves to be consider'd: Among the many Texts of Scripture quoted by our Adversaries in this Controversy, some are alledg'd to prove the *Infallibility* of the Pope, separately and singly consider'd as St. *Peter's* Successor: Such as these, e. g. ¹ *Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, &c.* ² *I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not, &c.*---- Again, others of these Texts are alledg'd to prove the *Infallibility* of General Councils, whether with the Pope as a Member of them, or without him: Such as these; ³ *He that beareth you, beareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me.*---- ⁴ *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*---- ⁵ *It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, &c.*---- ⁶ *Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*---- Lastly,

¹ Matt. xvi. 18, 19.

² Luke xxii. 32.

³ Luke x. 16.

⁴ Matt. xviii. 20.

⁵ Acts xv. 28.

⁶ Matt. xxviii. 20.

there.

there are others of these Texts, which if they prove any thing, prove the *Infallibility* of the Church in general, or of any particular Church: Such as these; ⁷ *If he neglect to hear the church, let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican.* ----- ⁸ *The church of the living God, the pillar and the ground of truth.* Now concerning these Texts taken all together, and as made use of by the Church of *Rome*; I say, either that they prove nothing, or they prove too much; even so much as will overthrow the whole *Romish* System. They design to prove *Infallibility* by 'em: I confess, in my Opinion they mean nothing like it: But if they do, some of 'em must prove that the Pope is *infallible*; others of 'em that a General Council is so; and others that the Church either universal or a particular one, has this Privilege: And all these Propositions must be true, they being all suppos'd to be confirm'd by Scripture. But is not this a great deal more than the Church of *Rome* desires to see proved, or will admit to be true? Do they like to have their *Infallibility* thus widely spread, and laid as it were in common? Will the Pope own that a Council has it; or a Council that the Pope has it, and they themselves have no share in it? Or will either Pope or Council admit, that a particular Congregation of Christians, or a few Christian Bishops got together, are endow'd with *Infallibility*? Thus it must be, if they interpret Scripture right: And yet if it is thus, the whole Fabrick of the Church of *Rome's Authority* and *Infallibility* is demolish'd.

I should now go on to take notice of their other Arguments, which (as they say) unanswerably prove

⁷ Matt. xviii. 17.

⁸ 1 Tim. iii. 15.

the Infallibility of their Church : Such as these : *
 If the Church may err, why do we (as the Creed does) call her *Holy*? A Church united in the Profession of any Error, is so far from deserving that Character, that, on the contrary, it is a wicked Assembly.---- Again; † If the Church, particularly the Church Representative, or the Body of Pastors, may err, why do they, when met in Council, denounce their Anathema's against such as refuse to receive or submit to their Decrees? If they be supposed fallible in making them, this is such a piece of Wickedness as they would never be guilty of.---- Again; ‡ If the Church could err, she might entirely fail; which is directly contrary to express Promises of Christ, and therefore she must be owned to be infallible.--- Again; || They argue the Church's Infallibility, from her perpetual Visibility: The true Church (say they) must always be visible and knowable; but if she could err, she could no longer be known to be the true Church. I hope there is no great danger of any one's being perverted by Proofs of this sort; for I think verily it requires no great Skill to confute them. They are urged by no less Names than Cardinal *Bellarmino* and Cardinal *Richelieu*; and therefore (were it not for fear of trespassing too much upon your Patience) I would give you what, I apprehend, would be full Answers to them. But I must forbear. There is one other Argument which they boast so much of, and have so often successfully urg'd for perverting some to their Church, and confirming others in it, that I

* Card. *Richelieu*, L. 1. c. 13.
 Milit. L. 3. c. 14. §. *Tertio obligamur.*
 ubi sup. & c. 4. || Id. Ib. c. 5.

† *Bellarmino*. de Eccles.
 ‡ Card. *Richelieu*,

think I ought not wholly to pass it by, especially since in some former Parts of this Discourse, I have led you to expect it should be taken notice of and answered. It is to this purpose :

Must it not be horrid Impiety, to suppose, that divine Providence has so little Concern for, and the blessed Redeemer so little Care about the Welfare of his Church, as to have left no certain infallible Method of deciding all Controversies, coming at Truth and the true Sense and Meaning of Scripture? If the Church is not a *visible* and *infallible* Tribunal, always in a Condition to determine Differences, what must become of *Her* ; what must become of Truth and Christianity itself? Will there not a thousand Heresies be broach'd, that must tear out her very Bowels, rend in pieces the seamless Coat of Christ, darken Truth, and make Error triumphant; shake the Faith of Christians, and fill their Minds with endless Doubts and Uncertainty? There must therefore be somewhere a *Judge* to pronounce and decide : Scripture is so far from ending Controversies, that it is well known to have been the Occasion of them : There's not a Heretick but what quotes it, and endeavours to impose upon weak Minds, by the false Meaning they put upon it. In many Points the Sense of it is so obscure and doubtful, that the Interpretation which Hereticks give of it, seems as plausible as that which the Church herself affixes. There must therefore be a living speaking *Judge*, to interpret this *dead*, this *unsens'd* Letter : And unless such an one be own'd and submitted to, every Tinker or Cobler must be left to judge of Christian Doctrine, and to find out the Meaning of Scripture for himself.---

Thus

Thus do they bluster. By the Noise of their Triumphs on this occasion, one would be apt to conclude that they had gain'd a compleat Victory: And yet after all, when the Matter comes to be sifted, this Argument is as harmless an one as any of the rest they make use of. I could almost wish the Time would allow me to enlarge on the following Observations; which tho' I can do no more than just suggest them, will furnish you with Materials for a full Answer to any one who may attempt to pervert you by so fallacious an Argument.

1. That the *Impiety* talk'd of, falls to their share, who thus boldly prescribe to God and the Redeemer, what they ought to have done, and what they must be suppos'd to have done, for the Welfare of the Church: And that we Protestants shew much more Reverence and Modesty, when we turn the Argument upon our Adversaries, and tell them, God has no where commission'd, or pointed out, such an *infallible Judge* as they talk of, and therefore we can't be perswaded that such an one is necessary.

2. That such a *Judge* as they talk of, can never be fit to determine *all* Controversies; till it is first agreed by the contending Parties, that he is *infallible*. For, one of the most important Controversies now subsisting in the Christian World is, Whether there be any such *Judge*? and *Where he is*? Now it would be very absurd to send me to one, whom I am not yet suppos'd to believe *Infallible*, to be determin'd by him whether he is *Infallible* or not.

3. There can be no Necessity of such a *Judge* to determine *all* Controversies in Religion, because it is not necessary that *all* such Controversies should be decided. There are a great many disputed Points

and different Opinions, which neither affect our Interest in the Favour of God, nor are at all inconsistent with the *Peace* of the Church; or that *Unity* among its Members, which Christ the Head of the Church so earnestly recommends.

4. If a Judgment may be form'd of what *would be* hereafter, by what *has been* heretofore; we may conclude that such a *Judge*, tho' he were to be found, would neither prevent *Heresies* from arising, nor put an End to all *Controversies*. Our blessed Saviour was such a *Judge*; able *infallibly* to decide in all Cases, and yet the Jewish Church in his Days run into many Errors; and among the rest, that pernicious one of mistaking and rejecting the Messiah. - - - If it be objected that this was, because they did not own him *as* such a *Judge*; the Answer is obvious: That since our Lord gave at least as good Evidence of his being *Infallible*, as any other can pretend to give, it is at least as likely that the *Infallibility* of any other will be, as that his shou'd have been disown'd. The Apostles were (it is allow'd) under the Guidance of an infallible Spirit in all things relating to the Kingdom of Christ, and the Propagation of his Religion in the World; and yet *Heresies* sprang up in their Days: Nay, and St. Paul (it seems) thought them not only unavoidable, but that Providence suffer'd them to arise, * *that they which are approved might be made manifest*. - - - There were Divisions among the *Corinthians* even after all the Pains St. Paul had taken to restore *Unity* and *Peace* among them.--Nay, in the Church of *Rome* herself, notwithstanding all her Boasts of an *infallible living Judge*, to whom all her Members

may have recourse, there are (for ought I see) as different, as inconsistent Opinions, as are to be found among Christians, who own no such Judge.

5. and Lastly. Every meek, humble, sincere Lover of, and Enquirer after Truth, may hope for, and reckon upon such Assistance of the Spirit of God, as will enable him by the Rule of Scripture to judge of, and determine for himself all such Controversies in Religion, as it is absolutely necessary to his Salvation to judge, or believe, or determine any thing about. If a Man thus dispos'd, and with the Promise of such Assistance, is not secure from all fatal Error, and in the way to come at all Truth, necessary for him to know; I see no other Method by which he can be so; I am sure the way of *Authority* and *Infallibility* won't do it; and if I don't strangely mistake the Meaning and Design of many Passages of Scripture, this Method will do it.

If I had time, I shou'd go on now, and consider the Proofs pretended to arise from the Testimony of the Fathers; for tho' their Writings were long in the almost sole Possession of the Friends to the *Romish* Cause; and during several dark Ages were so little read, or attended to, that *They* had Opportunity to mangle and alter, to blot out, and foist in, as might best serve their Cause and support their Pretensions; nay, tho' gross Falsifications of these Writings have been pointed out to them, and prov'd upon 'em; yet still, even in the Condition they now are, it might from them be plainly shewn, that for several Hundreds of Years after Christ, the Fathers never dream'd, nor made mention of, any such *Authority* or *Infallibility* as the Church of *Rome* now claims,

Nay

Nay farther, if I had time, I cou'd lay before you what must (I think) be a sufficient Inducement to any impartial Mind, either to believe that the Church of *Rome* herself suspects or doubts of her own *Infallibility*; or else to condemn her for having acted the most unjust, the most unmotherly, the most absurd part in the World, for not having employ'd it in a proper Manner, and for the kindest and most useful Purposes. Why does she suffer, and sometimes direct, her own Doctors to go on writing *fallible* Commentaries on Scripture, as contradictory and inconsistent, as any of those written by Protestants? Why does she not once for all bless the World with an *infallible* Interpretation of the whole Bible, and an exact Account of all the Church's *unwritten Traditions*? Why does she not find out an *infallible* Method for inducing all the World to hearken and submit to her *infallible* Decisions? She has, I know, found out, and made use of, one Method for this purpose; she has Censur'd, Curs'd, Spoil'd, Imprison'd, Banish'd, Tortur'd, Committed to the Flames, and Doom'd to Hell and Damnation, to promote this hopeful Design; but tho' she has been too successful, she is yet far, I hope, very far, from having fully carry'd her Point.

O ROME! Haughty, Cruel ROME! ¹ Thou hast long glorified thy self, lived deliciously, and said in thy heart, I sit a Queen, and am no Widow, and shall see no sorrow: But ² the multitude of Sorceries, and abundance of Inchantments, are found with thee: ³ The Kings and Inhabitants of the Earth have been made drunk with the Wine of thy Fornication:

¹ Rev. xviii. 7.

² Isai. xlvii. 9.

³ Rev. xvii. 2.

* *Thou thy self art drunken with the Blood of the Saints and Martyrs of Jesus: Therefore ⁵ shall thy Plagues come upon thee in one Day, Death, and Mourning, and Famine; yea, thou shalt be utterly burnt with Fire; for strong is the LORD GOD who judgeth thee.*—In the mean while, and till that Day of Recompense comes,

May Almighty God, who has often, and almost by Miracle, preserv'd these Nations, from falling again into her Clutches, and feeling the Effects of her deep Malice and savage Cruelty; still protect, still defend us! May the *Protestant Interest*, the Cause of *Truth*, and *Virtue*, and *Liberty*, be establish'd, and own'd, and propagated! May the Blessing of Heaven rest upon all *Protestant* Princes and States; and especially upon our most Gracious Sovereign King GEORGE, and every Branch of his August FAMILY! May we and all his Subjects stand fast by, and be secur'd in the Possession of, that Christian Liberty with which Christ has made us free! And finally, for the Honour and Advancement of that pure and uncorrupted Christianity which we profess; may we all of us take care to get our Minds and Tempers form'd, our whole Conduct and Behaviour regulated, by the generous, human, excellent Principles and Precepts of it! God of his infinite Mercy grant it, for the Sake of Jesus Christ, &c.

* Rev. xvii. 6.

⁵ Rev. xviii. 8.

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